OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Committee

Purpose: -- "To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."

VOL. I JUNE, 1947 No. 3

A Prayer

O God, we thank thee for the stir of thy Spirit within us;
for the courage which is equal to every new day;
for the hopes which rise out of the failures of yesterday;
for the resolve which lifts its head above wrong and woe, and affirms its right to repent and begin again;
for the life which cannot be holden by death;
for the healing which comes to wounded hearts through time;
for the sunrise which is greater than our fires and ashes;
for the joy which breaks in we know not how and when least expected;
for the disappointment which releases better desire;
for the darkness where the roots grow;
for the golden thread of valor and good-will never lost through all the strange wanderings of man;
for the labors of those who have sown that others may reap;
for the high calls to duty in our day and time;
for the goodness which is at the heart of the world;
for the spirit of Jesus Christ;
for all the Saints;
for all we love;
and for the longing of this our prayer.
Amen.

True Unitarian Advance

If we wish to be successful, not to say scientific in the realm of religious growth I think we should be careful in the use of words. In the United States as in other lands, the word Unitarian is fundamentally a theological and religious word. It has been a liberal Christian term for placing greater theological emphasis upon the unity of God. Unless one has God in mind and the Christian church in mind, so far as I can see, the word has no proper meaning for us. So that a "Unitarian Advance" can only be through a deeper worship of God as the one life over all. And it follows that the word church is also limited to the Christian tradition. To call a group of people a church, who are not primarily concerned with Christian worship is a misuse of the word. One cannot regard a forum, or a debating society, or some ordinary community group as a church. We do not have educational denominations or philanthropic denominations. These precious activities of the human heart have their own realm.

To think in general about "Unitarian Advance", the history of the American Unitarian Association gives some light. A group of individuals formed the American Unitarian Association in the year 1825 to "diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity". In such a purpose and method they continued their work until 1886, when they asked churches to send delegates to share in their councils. This condition continued until 1925.

It had been proposed in 1867 to change 'pure Christianity' to 'pure religion', by some who later organized the Free Religious Association. This resulted in religious controversy that continued for many years. In 1872 Thomas J. Mumford, Editor of the **Christian Register**, suggested that Unitarians "who have ceased to accept Jesus", withdraw from the Unitarian body. In June 1886 the Directors of the American Unitarian Association adopted a resolution in which they said, they "would regard it as a subversion of the purpose for which its funds have been contributed, as well as of the principles cherished by its officers, to give assistance to any church or organization which does not rest emphatically on the Christian basis".

It was in this spirit that our churches had their largest numerical growth and became a true denomination; near the turn of the century some 500 churches were listed in the Year Book.

I have no adequate answer to the problem why our churches have fallen off continually in recent years, although I know the many reasons given. But something happened in 1925 which quite changed the character of the American Unitarian Asso-

ciation; and thus gave our fellowship a different standing among churches. (a) The By-Law that used the term 'pure Christianity' was changed to read 'pure religion'; and the term Christianitty largely disappeared from formal records. (b) Delegates were welcomed from educational and philanthropic and other associations on an equality with church delegates.

Is it fair to raise the question whether our American Unitarian Association can longer be regarded as a Christian organization, if it discards the Christian vocabulary? Also, could one raise the question whether the Association is a specifically religious organization, if philanthropic and educational and other societies are on a par with churches in its administrations? And again is there not a moral problem involved if money raised to promote the interests of "pure Christianity" is used for more general purposes?

In my mind there is not likely to be a true Unitarian Advance until there is brought about a real, a spiritual revival of liberal Christianity.

JOHN CARROLL PERKINS
(Minister Emeritus, King's Chapel, Boston, Mass.)

Why I Left The Unitarian Church

(Extracts of a letter from a distinguished scientist, head of a major institution of learning, in answer to the question, "Why did you leave the Unitarian Church?")

"In the course of our membership of - - years a number of significant changes occurred . . . preaching grew thin and repetitious, without evidence of fresh intellectual effort. The older and more substantial part of the church's constituency began to fade out of the picture and a floating element to replace it, attracted by a sort of you-can-hoist-yourself-by - your - bootstraps psychology which made up the greater part of the preaching.

With a sense of imminent tragedy hanging over the world and the whole moral structure of civilization in peril, there was no real grappling with the issues and no evidence of any resource in which society might seek salvation. Unitarianism appeared more and more as an historic corrective which had largely completed its mission and was largely without significant content for our times. It was impossible to believe that a gospel consisting almost solely of "believe in yourself" and "you have a right to your own opinion" could cope with the crisis.

With a growing sense of unmet needs we decided to . . . transfer our membership to a church of the neighborhood and family type . . . the - - - Presbyterian Church. . . . While much of the preaching represents a more orthodox, i.e., Pauline, view of Christianity than our own, we find the solid scholarship and intellectual depth behind it far more challenging to our spiritual life than the reiteration of liberal slogans and psychological catch-words.

I have come to doubt whether the weaknesses of organized Unitarianism are curable. Much of its corrective mission appears to have been fulfilled. Its positive content is not easily discernible. It has no recognizable intellectual leadership. Its ministry is not being supplied from within, but too largely by men seeking escape from an uncomfortable orthodoxy, who never quite throw off the complexes of their struggle for liberation. Its sense of a traditional necessity for pioneering too often leads little men down bizarre paths. Its membership represents no essential commitment. It does not appear to stir up in its followers large and statesmanlike impulses which are represented in the higher aspects of the missionary enterprise — such as the Near East Colleges.

Dean Sperry Speaks to Unitarians

The second annual supper meeting of the Unitarian Christian Committee was held in Boston during Anniversary Week. The attendance was high — strikingly so in view of the three Ministerial Alumni Associations and the Evening Alliance meetings held at the same hour — and the experience was enriching, falling, as it did, within the orbit of the Committee's purpose to deepen the spiritual life of the churches.

Theodore C. Browne, chairman of the Unitarian Christian Committee, presided over the meeting, and introduced Rev. Paul H. Chapman who sought briefly to show how unjust was the charge that the Committee's purpose was divisive. All the evidence went to show that there is need for just such a fellowship as this.

Mr. Chapman introduced Rev. Harvey Swanson, editor of the Committee's modest publishing venture, **Our Faith**, who announced that monthly supplies of **Our Faith** would be available to any church asking for them.

To many of those present, harassed as they were by the public airing of a division within the denomination's administrative family, the address given at this meeting by Dean Williard L. Sperry of the Harvard Divinity School proved to be a benediction He dealt with spiritual realities. "It makes a very great difference to me," he said, "whether I believe in God."

There were, he said, some earnest ethicists who thought that belief in God made no difference. The Dean admired their

moral zeal and their refusal to give an easy answer to the problem of evil. But he doubted whether "humanist religious movements" had any future. "The humanist religious movements will have to re-organize themselves as ethical culture societies. And the history of ethical culture societies is such that it does not seem to prophesy vigorous life."

The Dean described religious experience as the awareness of our total environment, of the consciousness of belonging to God. Such experience will serve to restore the vanishing sense of the majesty of life.

Nor need the people of Christendom hanker after any other religion than that provided by the organic succession of spiritual lives within Christianity. Christianity, for us, has been "begotten, not made." Since you cannot manufacture or "assemble" a religion, there is no chance of our getting beyond Christianity.

Dean Sperry's address, which seemed to harmonize so well with the feelings of the delegates present, who came from various parts of the country, closed with an appeal to maintain the private practices of the religious life.

R. G.—S.

Is Freedom Enough?

Our Unitarian faith is based upon intellectual and religious liberty. We hear that constantly. But is it not grounded also in the realities of the spirit—God, Duty, Prayer, and Immortality? Is there not an irreducible minimum of the faith that makes faithful? Some things are commonly believed among us. If there are none, then our Free Churches have no more cohesion than grains of sand. I am persuaded, however, that to be true to our history as an emancipating movement in religion and theology our Free Churches must always remain Free Christian Churches. What a distinguished Unitarian theologian once said is true today: "All religions that diligently labor, all religions that devoutly aspire, deserve our sympathy and claim our respect. But Christianity is more than religion: it is history's highway, humanity's thoroughfare. Whatever paths diverge from it will return to it again or lose themselves in nothingness. In it is wholeness, and the widest vision, and the largest liberty."

WILLIAM SAFFORD JONES
(Minister Emeritus, Portsmouth, N. H.)

What Voice is This?

One hundred and fifty years ago a reassuring voice was heard in the land. It brought new hope and faith that Christianity could be redeemed; that the Bible could become an understandable and helpful book; that the rediscovery of Jesus as a leader and teacher was possible; that our knowledge of God is a progressive revelation and that our communion with God can lift us to the highest level of human development.

This liberal and spiritual interpretation of high religion spread over our land. A great missionary spirit pervaded the people and churches grew and expanded their influence apace. In fact their effect was far out of proportion to their numbers. They developed free and liberal churches whose spiritual power was their chief characteristic.

After many years a new and discordant note came to be heard in some of these churches which had been founded as liberal Christian churches. The sermons became addresses; prayers were changed to "words of aspiration;" the Bible was set aside; Jesus was considered a secondary prophet and the name of God was no longer heard.

All this time there have been many other strong Unitarian Churches, quite as liberal and free, where the name of God is not only spoken but held in reverence; where Jesus is chief of the prophets; where the Bible is frankly discussed and freely studied and used; and where the sermon is a teaching part of a service which seeks to bind the congregation together in a religious experience.

The voice of the Unitarian Christian Committee seeks to reassure those who fear that most Unitarian Churches have become Ethical Culture or Debating Societies. Every individual and church wishing to help in the continued development of churchmanship and in broadcasting the positive affirmations of Unitarian Christianity are cordially invited to join this committee.

PAUL HARMON CHAPMAN
(Secretary, Unitarian Christian Committee)

An Answer to The Challenge of Humanism

How shall we answer religious humanism? In three ways: First, its assumption that science makes belief in God impossible is an assumption that will not stand, for it is denied by the scientists themselves. Second, its emphasis upon the psychological origin of the idea of God in contradistinction to the reality of God is merely the ignoring of a problem and not the solution of it. And third, the apparent belief of humanism that the most effective way to win men to social righteousness is to wean them away from a belief in God is a supremely mistaken belief.

It is not an issue between humanism and theism, but between humanism without theism, and humanism with theism. If we disregard the negative side of humanism,

there is nothing in it which is not already in an intelligent theism. Let us all be humanists, my friends, good humanists! Let us exalt the supreme worth of human life, and give ourselves unselfishly and devotedly to the uplifting and enriching of human life. But let us also recognize that the phrase "the supreme worth of human life" is an empty phrase unless man is truly the child of God. And as we give ourselves to the service of man, it is surely our greatest inspiration to feel, as Paul felt, that it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do. He is the source of our aspiring life. He is the goal of our quest. He is the sustaining strength that carries us through all our efforts even in the face of discouragement and defeat. In Him we find the explanation and meaning of our life, and in His service is our supreme joy.

HARVEY SWANSON

The Ultimate Reason

"To believe in Nothing as the cause of the supernal processes by which the cosmos, and man in it, have come into being: this is indeed the supreme renunciation of reason. Yet men who will tell you that to find two rows of bricks piled upon another is evidence that a mind and a hand have been at work will tell you also that the building up of fiery worlds and their launching into space is no evidence for a living cause!"

From "And Another Thing"
by Howard Spring

Worth Quoting

There is still in the Judaeo-Christian tradition a spirit which is too vigorous to reman cramped and too alive to be held in the ecclesiastical tombs. When it rises with uplifted head, it affirms life in a very special and wonderful way. It is a sacrificial enthusiasm for humanity with all its ghastly imperfections. It is a joyous acceptance of life with all its sweets and bitters. It is a defiant celebration of life through worship and praise. It is a salute with a spiritual sword, an honoring of the immaterial flag of the universe as being incredibly the banner of Eternal Love. It is Christ's own passion for life.—V. T. P.

Rendition

"We defend religion too much. Vital religion, like good music, needs no defense but rendition. A wrangling controversy in support of religion is precisely as if the members of an orchestra should beat folks over the head with their violins to prove that music is beautiful. But such procedure it no way to prove that music is beautiful. Play it!

—HARRY E. FOSDICK

"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (except July and August) by The Unitarian Christian Committee, 27 Marlborough St., Boston, 16, Mass. Mr. Theodore Browne, Chairman; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

Editor: Rev. Harvey Swanson, 538 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster, Pa.

Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to Mr. Robert Rantoul, Treasurer, 17 Channing St., Cambridge 38, Mass.

Contributions toward the expenses of "Our Faith" are gladly welcomed from all friends.

Extra copies of "Our Faith" in quantity may be secured, for distribution in local parishes, and for literature tables, from the editor, or from King's Chapel House, 27 Marlborough St., Boston, 16, Mass.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.

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